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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 004747

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TAGS: [KPAO](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [TW](#)

SUBJECT: PFP SPOKESMAN SAYS PARTY'S FUTURE UNCERTAIN

REF: A. TAIPEI 4646

[1](#)B. TAIPEI 4715

Classified By: DIR Douglas H. Paal, Reason 1.4(D)

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: This is our third cable looking at media strategies and public platforms of Taiwan's main political parties in the run-up to the December 3 elections. The opposition People First Party (PFP) is competing in 4 out of 23 races in the upcoming elections, but their inability to coordinate with fellow opposition Kuomintang (KMT) and lack of media coverage are hurting the party's chances. PFP Spokesman Hsieh Kong-ping expressed concerns about his party's future survival, and he reiterated his party's unchanged stance on arms procurement. (Previous cables on KMT and ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) public posture reftels.) End Summary.

PFP Focused on Keelung, an "Indicator" of Party's Future

[1](#)2. (SBU) Hsieh noted that the PFP is fielding four candidates in the December 3 elections: Keelung City, Taichung City, Miaoli County, and Hualien County. In the other 19 constituencies, the PFP is not fielding a candidate. The PFP is focused mostly on the Keelung mayoral race, in which PFP candidate and current legislator Liu Wen-hsiung has the best chance of winning among all PFP candidates, Hsieh commented.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Hsieh expressed frustration over the lack of campaign coordination with the KMT. In the Keelung race, for example, the KMT is also fielding a candidate of its own. Hsieh claimed that although the PFP has shown good faith by trying to work with the KMT, the KMT has "not responded" in kind to PFP's overtures. Hsieh elaborated that PFP Chairman James Soong has campaigned for KMT candidates in seven races, but no major KMT political figure has yet to campaign for a PFP candidate.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Hsieh further asserted that the Keelung race will be an "important indicator" of his party's future, stating that, due to lack of coordination with the KMT, the race will gauge his party's ability to stand on its own. He showed concern over his party's future, suggesting that the party's increasing obsolescence in the political arena and declining public support are "very big problems" that require serious internal discussion.

Media Dominated by Negative Campaigning

[1](#)5. (SBU) Hsieh said that the Taiwan media is portraying the election as a fight between the DPP and KMT, and without adequate media coverage, the PFP has had difficulty highlighting its policies. Hsieh feels that negative campaigning has dominated media coverage of Taiwan elections during the past 10 years, and this year's negative campaigning started with the Chen Che-nan and Kaohsiung Rapid Transit Corp (KRTC) scandal.

[1](#)6. (SBU) Hsieh believes that the DPP has now taken the offensive, trying to downplay the KRTC scandal by raising the issue of 18% interest rates on civil servants' pension savings. Hsieh asserted that, since these civil servants (government employees, military personnel, teachers) traditionally do not vote for the DPP, the DPP has nothing to lose. Rather, the DPP is trying to draw more votes from farmers who have not been able to receive pensions because the high interest rate leaves no money for them.

Arms Procurement Policy Unchanged

[1](#)7. (SBU) Hsieh explained that the PFP's policy on arms procurement has not changed: the special budget's price tag is too high, and the party is opposed to the DPP's handling of the legislative proceedings. Hsieh at one point suggested that there may be room for discussion if the price tag comes down and the DPP takes appropriate procedural steps in the legislature. However, he concluded that since the United States is sticking to its "one China" policy and no independence means no war across the Strait, there really is no need for additional procurement at this time.

Comment: Party in Decline

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18. (C) Hsieh's comments reflect the common party line especially on the arms procurement issue, but his frustration at the party's weakness and lack of direction, made worse by what he considers a form of betrayal by the KMT, was evident throughout the discussion. In contrast to the bustling activity in the DPP and KMT headquarters, it was interesting to observe the silence in the PFP headquarters, especially considering the upcoming elections, perhaps the biggest indicator of a party clearly in decline.  
Bio Note

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19. (SBU) Hsieh was a reporter for the United Daily News before joining the People First Party as its spokesman in 2000. He showed his own political ambitions when he tried to run for the legislature a few years ago. He ended up aborting his election bid because his party supported a different candidate, prompting him to temporarily leave the party in anger before James Soong convinced him to return. Hsieh had previously studied for a PhD in Sociology at Temple University in the United States from 1974-1978, but he returned to Taiwan before finishing his degree.  
Paal